

The Cicerone Project Inc.

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Newsletter Number 3

February 1999

NSW Footrot Steering Committee Visit to the New England

As a follow-up to the Footrot day held by **The Cicerone Project** last July, several members of the NSW Footrot Steering Committee attended a series of meetings in the New England area in January.

The aim of the Strategic Committee is to eliminate virulent footrot from NSW. They are not trying to eradicate benign footrot. At present the State is divided into areas which are "Protected", with less than 1% incidence of virulent footrot; "Control" with between 1% and 10% virulent footrot; "Residual" with over 10% virulent footrot. The Committee hopes to have the whole of the State in "Protected" or "Control" status by December 2000.

WHY PRODUCERS SHOULD TRY TO ERADICATE FOOTROT

Eradication of footrot should be a goal for all sheep producers, even if you think you have little problem. Why? Well there are three main reasons:

- ◆ To produce that extra centimetre of wool or save that extra week of feed which could just make it easier to get through winter or the next drought.
- ◆ To preserve a footrot free status for the area, especially with OJD re-stockers coming onto the market in the future.
- ◆ It is part of being a responsible neighbour in just the same way as being in your local

bushfire brigade is part of helping each other.

SPREAD OF THE DISEASE

Footrot is caused by the bacterium *Dichelobacter nodosus*. It is transmitted between sheep when:

- ◆ an infected sheep contaminates the ground on which it walks
- ◆ sheep with susceptible feet (softened by moisture for 2-3 weeks) traverse the same ground and become contaminated with bacteria
- ◆ bacteria colonise the recipient sheep's foot and continue the cycle.

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To infect others, an infected sheep must be producing infective doses of bacteria which are leaving its foot. If these infective doses are viable for sufficient time (up to 4 days) they can cause contamination of a recipient sheep whose own hoof is soft enough to allow colonisation.

For this to occur we need suitable conditions of temperature and moisture. A mean daily temperature of 10 degrees (i.e. 0° to 20°, or 5° to 15°) and moist feet i.e. soft feet. If you walk through the paddock at 10 a.m. and get wet feet, then it's wet enough to trigger the disease.

In cold, wet conditions the disease will not start, but the sheep's feet may become wet enough and soft enough to set up the disease, which can then break out as soon as the temperature warms up. The disease starts between the claws and spreads from there by running under the hoof.

Other factors to consider include the length of the pasture. The viability of the bacteria is affected by heat and moisture and solar radiation down at sheep-foot level.

The bacteria only survives for a maximum of 4 days outside the hoof, but the NSW Steering Committee advises a contaminated area be spelled for 7 days as an extra precaution.

DIAGNOSIS

Diagnosis of footrot in flocks is essentially a field diagnosis which involves careful and thorough investigation of the flock and the flock history. Correct diagnosis is essential. The person ultimately responsible for the diagnosis is the District Veterinarian or Veterinary Officer.

Footrot may be diagnosed as VIRULENT or BENIGN in the field. Laboratory tests using the gelatin gel test may be conducted to assist in the diagnosis. Results come back as STABLE (what we used to call positive) or UNSTABLE (what we used to call negative.) Any STABLE result from the lab test indicates that VIRULENT strains of the organism are present, even if the field diagnosis originally suggested benign footrot.

This issue of diagnosis lead to much discussion at the meetings as local producers feel there are strains in the area with low expressiveness in the field which come back as gel stable.

CONTROL and ERADICATION OF FOOTROT

Before you can eradicate footrot, you need to reduce the severity of the disease or the number of infected animals so eradication then becomes more feasible. This is the 'control' phase and needs to occur in the 'spread' period (suitable conditions of warmth and moisture). Eradication should be timed for the 'non-spread' period (when it is too cold or too dry for spread). There are specific problems in defining this spread period for the New England because this area is one of summer rainfall so there can often be the warmth and moisture necessary for spread of the disease.

The producer must acknowledge there is a problem and must plan to control and ultimately to eradicate the disease. In control mode you may live with the disease for a long time immediate eradication by de-stocking is one choice but the financial side of this option has to be examined!

CONTROL MODE

Consider which sheep to treat and which to cull, use footbaths to lower the incidence,

make sure the fences are all good, the sheep yards are in top order and plan animal movement to minimise spread from one mob to another

HOW TO ERADICATE FOOTROT FROM YOUR PROPERTY

To eradicate footrot from your property successfully, it must be your number one priority because if the window of time to eradicate happens to coincide with, for example, your usual lambing time, then you may have to rearrange things to deal with the footrot first.

Eradication should be in the non-spread period ie when it's too cold or too dry for spread. There are many options to consider as each property is different.

There are a number of steps to take:

- ◆ Accept you have a problem
- ◆ Set goals to eradicate the problem
- ◆ Keep good records
- ◆ Plan to lower the incidence in the control phase to give yourself a fighting chance!
- ◆ Destocking does work!
- ◆ Partial destocking ... cull infected sheep and keep the ones which are clean
- ◆ Full salvage.... there are lots of options if you are prepared to put in the work
- ◆ Footrot eradication needs to be the number one priority
- ◆ Timing of shearing, lamb marking and so on may need to be adjusted as it is important to keep mobs separated by a period of seven days
- ◆ Yards must be dry and good for working sheep
- ◆ Clean musters are **ESSENTIAL** so you need enough labour
- ◆ Insist that stock trucks are hosed out with water between mobs to minimise spread
- ◆ You need hands-on, meaningful assistance

- ◆ Try to win in as many mobs as possible
- ◆ It really can be done if you follow these steps!

SUPPORT GROUPS

There are areas in the State where eradication of footrot has been achieved only because neighbouring producers have worked together in **GROUPS**. In NSW there are currently 356 groups with a membership of 8500 producers who run 13 million sheep.

If a group of adjacent neighbours get together and help each other by making sure their fences are all in order, discuss timing of stock movement down roads, possibly helping each other to ensure the musters are clean and so on, it could be a real bonus for eradicating the disease.

Producer Initiated Research and Development (PIRDS) funding may be available for you to organise a group to tackle the footrot problem. You will need a minimum of 10 producers to attract funding .

Time is running out for initial applications (28 February 1999) but if you contact Caroline Gaden on 02 6772 2988 she can help with your application or you can check out the PIRDS web site at www.pird.com.au/ and get all the details you need.

THANKS

Thank you to Rob Walker, State Co-ordinator, and the local Rural Land Protection Boards for hosting the days. We would also like to thank the committee members for their attendance: John Plant (NSW Agriculture Flock health specialist) Geoff Reed (Australian Veterinary Association representative) Murray Watson from Young, (NSW Farmers representative) and Liz Chappell (Northern New England RLPB

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representative). Private contractor David Alley was also present at some sessions. The above notes were taken at the meetings of the Footrot Steering Committee in Armidale and Guyra by Caroline Gaden.

Caroline Gaden
Executive Officer

LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Dear Members,

Cicerone needs your help so we can help you.

We are a group of individuals attempting to search for more profitable ways of running our grazing businesses. An important part of this process is the involvement of local producers who recognise that some aspect of their business could be improved and are motivated to do something about it. Cicerone has achieved an adequate level of funding sourced from your wool tax contributions and now we need your help to put it to its best use.

We conducted a wide ranging survey of producers last February and identified a number of issues that they feel are a problem to production and therefore business performance. Late last year we began the process of asking for expressions of interest among research and extension organisations for partners to help address and find solutions to these issues.

Key among these production impediments is the problem of FOOTROT in the New England. Cicerone organised a field day last July, at which it became clear there was a depth of confusion and even resentment at the way the issue was being handled. Due to the subsequent activities of Cicerone and other local groups, the State wide Footrot Steering Committee held meetings in January with local producers and technical staff. These meetings were well attended and the discussions were lively and left the Steering Committee with a much better idea of the problems which are specific to the New England area, and had not been recognised to date. It is now very probable that research will be conducted to identify specific New England strains of footrot and determine how they survive in other regions of the State.

This is only the beginning. Cicerone intends to help interested producers to improve their performance in pasture persistence, internal parasite control, drought management and mitigation, grazing management and business and financial management.

To do all this we need your support and feedback..... please let us know what you want so we can direct our efforts where it will most help you.

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Regards

Hugh Sutherland

Phone 02 6778 4659, Fax 02 6778

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Email: hughsuth@northnet.com.au

A FIELD STUDY

ON FARM RESEARCH INTO THE ERADICATION OF GEL STABLE, LOW GRADE VIRULENCE FOOTROT

Murray and Dimity Fenwicke are allowing us to put their property, Branga North, and their footrot affected sheep under the microscope. They feel very strongly that footrot should be brought out of the closet, openly discussed and the social stigma removed.

An inspection of sheep in March 1998 indicated that footrot was present but the clinical picture was not clear, indicating either benign or low grade virulent footrot was present. Subsequently, a stable Gel test result was obtained and a diagnosis of virulent footrot was made.

Murray and Dimity made a decision that sheep over 2 years of age showing any foot abnormality would be sent for slaughter with no attempt to treat. The 1997 drop hoggets with lesions over score 2 were quitted, and those with 1 and 2 scores were treated with 10% zinc sulphate and isolated from other clean sheep. The first inspection of 3444 sheep took place in April 1998. Some 500 sheep were sold for slaughter. Out of 1300 1997 drop hoggets only 126 were detected with score 1 and 2 lesions which were retained to be treated.

August inspections showed all mobs, including suspects, to be clean.

By October the picture changed. Out of 1200 hoggets 74 had footrot lesions. A further inspection in November showed the problem was escalating with 50% of the hoggets suspect and a few mature ewes with lambs at foot showing low grade lesions. Both myself and Geoff Green made a clinical diagnosis of "low grade virulence" (what the Steering Committee used to call "intermediate" footrot). The environmental challenge was very high.

A lot of money and time had been spent and no progress had been made. To say that the Fenwickes were disappointed would be an understatement.

I made a submission to the RLPB Armidale which was successful. We needed to see if eradication was possible and cost out the process. It was agreed that board staff including John McFarlane and Geoff Green would be provided to carry out segregation and clinical foot paring. The writer, board staff and the Fenwickes would formulate a plan of action.

To date the initial inspection has not taken place, rain stopped play!
It has however, been decided to use Radicate for the treatment of both clean and suspect sheep. On this occasion attempts will be made to treat all ages of sheep with 1 and 2 scores but to quit sheep showing more severe lesions.

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Our thanks have to go to Milton Colburt of Radicate Pty Ltd who has donated chemical to this research project. Field studies using Radicate indicated a 94% cure rate even when treated sheep were run with non-treated infected stock. Milton is confident that low grade strains can be eradicated using Radicate and that even severe lesions will respond.

Graziers will be informed as results become available. Field days are planned which will act as a forum for producers to air problems on this very important issue.

Dr. Betty Hall

Elders Technical Services ARMIDALE

This article has been published with the permission of Murray and Dimity Fenwicke

THE LONG POND: Nyngan, 24th April 1990

Flying flags of destruction The deluge laden clouds
Sail over grave horizons In ghostly sodden shrouds.
Far and wide, west to north, Teeming tentacles of rain
Leave rising waters in their path Across the soaked terrain.
Artesian basins soak their fill Replenishing their tanks,
From earthen cracks the excess spills Flowing over broken banks.
Angrily the flood waves foam, Savage in their fluid wrath,
Tongues of water laden loam Dredging mud from silted trough.
Gullies rise up in revolt, Saturating precious soil,
Creeks overwhelmed by the assault, Raging rivers northward boil.
Victims of the torrent, Sheep and cattle seek high ground,
Helpless in the current Numbers dwindle as they drown.
"Beware the river! Watch the Bogan!" A disaster has been born,
Rising feet since rain began From upstream they tried to warn
Gallantly they made a stand, All hands, both young and old,
God help the town of Nyngan While the levees are patrolled.
Like Anzacs in another war, All rallied to the call
Becoming country folklore As they built the sandbag wall.
They filled the sacks day and night, Inspired, embattled garrison,
They didn't lose the noble fight, Fate beat them and furies won.
Fields and farmlands irrigated, Roads submerged, bridges torn,
Leveed town fast inundated, Isolated and forlorn
Floodwaters slowly stream away Leaving tracts of devastation,
Homes and shops smell of decay Amid the rotting vegetation.
Feathered messengers of life Soar where the clouds have raged,
No longer run the waters rife The powerful volumes caged.

by Grey Magpie (NSW)

Winner of the ABC Radio Rural Poetry competition

Vince Lombardo of Perth recently received an order for some millions of tins of corned beef for the Egyptian army with the proviso that the animals had to be killed in a certain way (halal). That has created huge problems for Australian business. Vince reported "*Some people in Indonesia would do it for me and so would others in South America, but it came back to the question of Egypt wanting Australian beef mainly because of mad cow disease in other countries. The Egyptians are also prepared to sign a contract regarding 200 tonnes each month of ox liver and butter. I have sent faxes to every manufacturer in Australia with regard to producing 25 kilo blocks of butter. What is happening with our primary producers when no one can supply customers with what they want?*"

Don't we want the business?

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From the editorial page of the December 1998 issue of the National Business Bulletin

experts, as well as taking listeners to people on the land to hear about their lives.

COUNTRY BREAKFAST

with
Shane Mahony

A new national weekly rural program starts on [ABC Radio National](#) on **6 February 1999**. Presented by **Shane Mahony**, it'll be an entertaining look at rural and regional issues, with interviews, stories from reporters on location all around Australia and regular updates of news, financial markets and weather.

The move is part of Rural Radio's plan to increase its Rural programming in the metropolitan areas of Australia in 1999, and to allow more city listeners the opportunity to hear about issues affecting people in the country.

The new program will offer in-depth coverage of social, economic and political events and issues affecting people beyond the urban fringe. Shane Mahony will put these developments into context for a broad general audience. He'll talk to rural industry leaders and

“The most certain thing about the world is that it will keep changing”
Sir Arvi Parbo

“A journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step”
Chinese proverb

Innovation at Elfin

It is not too often you discover an article about farming in the *National Business Bulletin*, so it was a pleasant surprise to read one about the Austin family of Elfin, near Coleraine.

"Necessity has mothered many inventions at Elfin" is the headline and the article gives a small insight into the continual innovation in their business. Not content to sit back and let things happen, part of Tim Austin's philosophy is "The one who wins is the one who thinks he can".

This approach has affected their outlook on wool. They have changed from stronger wool with a flock average of 22 micron to a finer wool with a flock average of 19 micron, increasing the kilogram production per

acre. Importantly, they are also looking at what their buyers want in terms of greater elasticity and excellent spinning qualities.

So much is the Austin family looking at the consumer end for their wool, that they have set up an organisation "Homestead Grazing" to find Australian

processors who are prepared to convert top quality wool into top quality fashion clothing. They are interested in the whole concept of vertical integration from wool producer to retail customers. They want the feed back of the type of fibres required by the clothing industry and how their wool rates.

Tim Austin also has a different perspective on

grazing, talking about converting specialised grasses into sunlight energy which can be used by the sheep to provide improved

wool. They recently moved from lambing in autumn to lambing in spring. This has given them greater fertility and the advantage of spring growth to feed the increased numbers of sheep.

As well as the wool enterprise, Elfinvale kelpies are a world famous part of Tim Austin's life and Elfin red gum furniture is a more recent addition to the family repertoire. There has been much innovation on Elfin in

the past and there are many more plans for the future.

The full article is available in the National Business Bulletin, December 1998.

WEEDS Identification Day
at CSIRO, Chiswick
on 18 March 1999 from 8.30am to 4pm
BOOKINGS ESSENTIAL
as numbers are strictly limited
(registration closes 12 March 1999)
Phone Ursula Taylor of the Weeds CRC on 02 6733 3075
Cost of the day is \$25

Computers, the internet and you

70% of farmers own a fax machine
70% own a computer
54% have a mobile phone
33% have a modem
29% use the modem and 2/3 of these use the internet.

For a number of years, the Kondinan Group has conducted an annual survey of WA farmers. The results have shown that use of the internet has increased from 0% in 1990 to 22% by 1997.

Those who understand computers and information technology say that we are today only at the beginning of their possibilities.

**Isn't it time you learned how to access this important source of information.
Book into the workshop to be held at TAS on 21st February.
Contact Caroline 02 6772 2988**

AN OLD POST ODYSSEY

Was young and strong, have aged since milled.
Been barked and treated, stapled, drilled.
The heat, the freeze, the rain, the dust,
Do blunt the barb, the wire rust.
Last strainer snapped, still upright, free,
But oh to be a Christmas tree.

by John Robertson (NSW)

From ABC Radio's Rural Poetry competition

1999 DIARY DATES FOR CICERONE MEMBERS

21 February **Learn how to use the Internet** at TAS 10am to 4.00pm

BOOKINGS ESSENTIAL

18 March **Weeds Identification Day** at CSIRO, Chiswick, 8.30am start

BOOKINGS ESSENTIAL

22 April **Marketing your wool clip** at CSIRO Liaison Centre

BOOKINGS ESSENTIAL

MARKETING YOUR WOOL CLIP

22 April 1999

Starting time 8.54am prompt

Liaison Centre at CSIRO

Cicerone members will be invited to stay for lunch
and discussion with the Guest speakers

Program:

8.54 am Welcome by the Cicerone Chairman Hugh Sutherland

9.00 am Knowing the cost of your production Bob Marchant

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What is **The Cicerone Project Inc?**

The Cicerone Project is a producer-led initiative to increase the relevance of research and extension efforts on the Northern Tablelands. The overall aim of The Cicerone Project is to increase the profitability and sustainability of grazing-based agriculture on the Northern Tablelands, by facilitating research, organising and creating extension activities, and working together to provide an environment in which researchers, extension agents and farmers can co-develop new ideas and techniques.

A key feature of the Project is that it is led by producers and involves individuals and groups with stakes in the success of Northern Tablelands agriculture.

It is intended that the Project will serve the interests of its financial members in particular and of the community at large by dissemination of information, creation of new knowledge and reduce the risks involved in these processes.

What is a Subscriber Member?

One who has expressed an interest in joining/supporting Cicerone and who has paid their subscriber fee of \$80. This will entitle the subscriber to vote at general meetings, to stand for election to the Management Board and to obtain privileges not available to general members of the public (e.g. to receive special mailouts, to attend courses arranged for members and to be involved in our projects).

Your Cicerone committee:

The following were elected at the inaugural general meeting of Cicerone:

Hugh Sutherland - producer rep. (Chairman) Phone 02 6778 4659

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Hugh Beattie - producer rep. (Treasurer)	Jim Scott - UNE rep. (Secretary)
Tim Wright - producer rep. (also SGS rep.)	Sonia Williams - Landcare rep.
Clare Bentley - NSW Agriculture rep.	Lachlan Fulloon - producer rep.
Kim Barnet - producer rep.	Rob Woolaston - CSIRO rep

Join us!

If you wish to join, fill in your contact details on the following form and send it with your cheque for \$80 made out to "The Cicerone Project Inc." to:

The Treasurer, The Cicerone Project Inc, PO Box 1593, ARMIDALE 2350

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Name:

Phone: **Fax:**

Address:

..... **Postcode:**